

Testimony by Matthew Morgan, Executive Director of Journey Home in support Right to Housing in Connecticut S.B. 168

Chairmen Lopes and Williams, Ranking Members, and esteemed members of the council,

I am speaking today in support of Senate Bill 168, to Act to establish a Right to Housing in Connecticut.

I have served as Journey Home's Executive Director for the past eleven years, and I speak today on behalf of the thousands of people who experience homelessness in the Capital Region every year, as well as the hundreds of thousands of people who are unstably housed who are barely making ends meet, who have no savings, and who are one large unexpected expense away from losing their housing. Journey Home works every day coordinating the emergency shelters, rental assistance housing programs, and homeless prevention programs in the Capitol Region. We have also been coordinating the COVID response and recovery efforts for those experiencing homelessness in the Capitol region.

Just 100 years ago there was no federal (TANF) program, no federal unemployment benefits, no social security benefits, or Medicare or Medicaid benefits. But before these federal programs were created, states led the way creating smaller programs that they could afford. States paved the way for the federal government to follow.

Homelessness is a prime example of the failure of our society to take care of its citizens and the traumatic experience of homelessness often negatively impacts people for years even after they are housed. We need to change this trajectory in our state. For 11 years I have been strategizing with partner agencies about how to end homelessness. What we have learned is that we cannot exclusively provide rental assistance to those experiencing homelessness, because there are far too many people at risk of homelessness who will become homeless by the time we house those who are already homeless. This means that as soon as there is a bed open at a shelter, we fill it with someone else who has fallen into homelessness. We must address housing at a larger scale, and establishing a right to housing in CT is the way to do it. While I acknowledge that it would be expensive and challenging for CT to immediately fund universal rental assistance to everyone who needs it, I also would argue that CT is one of the wealthiest states in the country, in the wealthiest country in the world, and one of the most highly educated, so if any state can figure out how to fund it, even if it starts small with a plan to expand, it is Connecticut. This bill just establishes the right to housing and the obligation to create that plan to protect the right.

The impact on housing of this pandemic has been massive. Now that Unite CT is no longer accepting applications, we are going to see huge numbers of people getting evicted, moving in with friends or family until they wear out their welcome, and then becoming homeless. Just as other states became leaders by creating change on a small scale, we in Connecticut can create change by protecting the right to housing, and by doing so, we can forge a path for the federal government to follow. It is time to correct the failure of our society to take care of its citizens, and bring our state and country into a new era where homelessness does not exist.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and I am happy to take questions.